

Ashland County Votes!

Partisan Primary Election Summary: Voting Results from February 21, 2023

Welcome to Ashland County's February 2023 election summary

Wisconsin's elections are highly decentralized, with elections conducted at the local level by over 1,900 local election officials in 72 counties and 1,851 municipalities. There are 16 municipalities in Ashland County that have election responsibilities.

In this election, there were 9,709 registered voters in Ashland County. Of those voters, 2,285 cast a ballot on February 21, which is a 24% participation rate for the County. This is a low turnout that can be attributed to there being only one seat open for election—a seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court. You can see a comparison of voter turnout in the last three elections that had one seat open for election.

In the very popular November 2022 election, the Ashland County turnout rate was 73%, which is three times higher than this election. All elections are important; however, not all voters choose to vote in each one.

The Last Elections With Only One Seat Open

Election	# Registered	Total Voters	% Who Voted
2020 Special Election May 12, 2020 Congress District 7	9,042 May 2020	3,979	44%
2021 Spring Primary February 16, 2021 State Superintendent	10,253 February 2021	968	9.44%
2023 Spring Primary February 21, 2023 Justice of the Supreme Court	9,709	2,285	24%

*From Voter Registration Statistics, WEC
<https://elections.wi.gov/statistics-data/voter-registration-statistics>

Ashland County, Wisconsin: February 21, 2023 General Election Results: Tally of Voters in 16 Jurisdictions

Unofficial Results from the Ashland County Clerk's Office

Jurisdictions	# Registered Voters	# People who Voted	% Registered Voters who Voted
Town of Agenda	273	53	19%
Town of Ashland	369	93	25%
Town of Chippewa	240	50	21%
Town of Gingles	481	105	22%
Town of Gordon	199	41	21%
Town of Jacobs	432	63	15%
Town of LaPointe	310	137	44%
Town of Marengo	239	79	33%
Town of Morse	351	88	25%
Town of Peeksville	126	33	26%
Town of Sanborn	666	56	9%
Town of Shanagolden	87	15	17%
Town of White River	535	106	20%
Village of Butternut	195	48	25%
City of Ashland: All wards	4,771	1,251	26%
City of Mellen	435	67	15%
TOTAL	9,709	2,285	24%

*From Registered Voters By Municipality (wi.gov); <https://elections.wi.gov/sites>

The Life Cycle of Your Wisconsin Election Ballot

When you vote, it's likely you only spend a few minutes with your paper ballot. You mark your votes, get a sticker, and check the results for who won that night. But your ballots have a much longer life cycle, with checks and balances in place along the way. They're designed and tested, and then distributed to local clerks who keep them under lock and key all the way through to election day and beyond. Elected or appointed municipal clerks document all movements of ballots weeks before and after Election Day.



Shanagolden Clerk Cindy Eder calibrated a voting machine during testing.

BEFORE ELECTION DAY

Most Wisconsin counties rely on a commercial printing company for both ballot design and production, though a few counties design them in house. From the moment a municipal clerk receives the ballots from a printer—usually a few days before absentee voting begins—they document every move. Ballots are stored in locked vaults, cabinets, or special containers in town, city, or village halls or official municipal buildings. Clerks test the ballots and tabulator machines for accuracy before each election, including a test that's required by state law to be open for public viewing and must take place within 10 days of the election date. After successful tests, the machines are locked with keys and tamper-evident seals with unique identification numbers, and stored in a locked area of the municipal building. A chain of custody record is kept with every machine.



A City of Ashland tabulator machine, marked as "sealed" after testing

ABSENTEE VOTING

After testing, ballots can be sent to absentee voters who've requested them. Before someone can receive an absentee ballot in the mail, they must already be registered to vote and make a written application request, which can be done on Wisconsin's myvote.wi.gov website or by checking with your local Clerk.

Before an absentee ballot is sent out, Clerks verify the voter's eligibility and log the request in official records. Once the voter is confirmed, a ballot can be mailed to the requested address listed in the voter's information.

The Clerks initial every absentee ballot issued, which is a key step that makes it a live ballot that can be legally cast. Ballots are folded, *along with a required copy of absentee voting instructions included in every State of WI ballot*, and placed into envelopes with postage. When the voter receives their ballot through USPS, they follow the instructions to vote and send it back, or drop it off at their polling location on election day. Some have questioned the security of the absentee voting process, but Wisconsin clerks and officials have defended the safeguards. **No widespread fraud with mail voting has been found in Wisconsin due to these safeguards.**

"An average of 29% of City of Ashland voters chose to vote absentee"

Sarah Szymaniak,
City of Ashland Election
Specialist

EARLY IN-PERSON

When a voter checks in for early voting, they have to state their name and address, and present a photo identification card. Staff verifies the voter information Wisconsin's online poll book system, WisVote. The voter then receives the same ballot that will be used on election day and fills it out as normal.

Under Wisconsin law, clerks can receive ballots but they can't start counting absentee ballots — whether they arrived in-person or by mail — until Election Day.

ON ELECTION DAY

Trained election workers check in each voter, verifying their identity, before handing them their ballot. Voters then enter a booth or voting station to mark their ballots.

The next stop for the now-completed ballot is the tabulator, which is a large machine that counts ballots faster and more accurately than people. The tabulators also check for errors on a ballot, such as too many circles colored in for a particular seat. If there's no problem, the machine drops the ballot into a locked bin.



Image: National Public Radio website

Voters may get an "I Voted" sticker after they've inserted their ballot into the tabulator, and they're done until the next election! But the ballot still has a way to go...

Did You Know?

- Ballot paper is thicker and designed specifically to fit in and be counted by tabulator machines.
- Each ballot has black spacer marks that tell the tabulator where to look for a voter's filled-in oval(s).
- Each ballot is unique to a specific election and cannot be reused

The Life Cycle of Your Wisconsin Election Ballot -continued

Once the polls close, election workers as a team open the tabulators to remove the ballots. Some may have been removed earlier to make room for more ballots in the bins, which is also documented in official records.

Workers then check for registered write-in candidates and tally those, if any. They also verify that the number of ballots cast equals the number of votes the machines recorded. If the numbers don't match, election workers will double check the voting machine bins, review the poll books, and recount paper ballots.

"The tabulator machines are not connected to the internet. After polls are closed, the final results are printed on physical paper tapes at the end of the night."

*Sarah Szymaniak,
City of Ashland Election Specialist*

PROCESSING ABSENTEE

On Election Day, voters might see poll workers run a handful of ballots through a tabulator that don't appear to come from in-person voters. They're counting absentee votes, which can only begin once the polls are open. The activity is documented on the inspector logs that are later sealed with other election materials.



Election workers process absentee ballots in pairs to add security to the ballots. (Credit: Will Cioci/Wisconsin Watch)

AFTER THE ELECTION

After being cast and counted, election workers place ballots into labeled bags that are then locked with a security seal like all other election materials. Used and unused ballots are secured in separate bags, and the number of each is documented in official records that get filed with the Ashland County clerk's office.

In Ashland County, all sealed election materials are taken to the county clerk the day after an election, according to Heather Schutte, Ashland County's Clerk. Each jurisdiction in Ashland County handles the long-term storage and collection of materials differently, but there are a few things Clerks keep in mind:

- By law, ballots cast for a federal office must be held for 22 months, and 12 months if they involve only state or local offices. The retention is to preserve evidence in the event of a law enforcement investigation or a recount.
- The day after the election, the Wisconsin Elections Commission randomly selects contests and polling places for special audits that further ensure the municipality's election was conducted properly. Municipalities in Ashland County have been randomly audited in the past, and no discrepancies were found.
- The ballots are eventually shredded and discarded when legally allowed by state law.
- Once an election is over, clerks will have just a few months to start all over to get ready for the next election.

"I store and destroy election materials based on the 'Destruction of Materials' guidance received from the Wisconsin Elections Commission"

*Heather Schutte,
Ashland County Clerk*



A poll worker processes absentee ballots received by mail. (Credit: Coburn Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch)

Welcome to New Registered Voters in Ashland County!

Why do registrations go up and down? Registration rates change each month. Clerks regularly update or enter new voter data in the statewide voter registration system to reflect a variety of changes to a voter's status.

Some of the reasons for an increase may include:

- The Ashland-Bayfield Counties chapter of the League of Women Voters conducted a bipartisan education & registration campaign for young voters of voting age in area high schools
- Volunteers made strong efforts to register voters in the Bad River Tribe
- New residents have recently moved to the County
- People want to have a voice in state & federal elections.

Some of the reasons for a decrease may include:

- Deaths
- People move out of the County
- Felony convictions
- An adjudicated incompetence status

Voter engagement trends have been measured in Ashland County's Elections starting in August of 2022 to look at help identify a better understanding of voters' needs. By looking at voter turnout rates for each jurisdiction from four elections in 2022 and 2023, it might become clearer whether more voter education programs are needed to increase turnout rates. The results could also help Extension and others do extensive and targeted voter registration events to include young people, new residents, and historically unregistered but eligible voters. **The next page has monthly changes in the last 7 months!**

Registered Voters in Ashland County, August 1, 2022 - February 1, 2023

(Source: WEC website)

What's Next?

After the April 2023 election, local specialists will examine all turnout rates in the last four elections and make recommendations to local elected officials about what may be needed--or celebrated--related to voter participation. The results will be published on the Ashland County Extension and Ashland County government web pages.

Voter registration information from all counties is posted on the WEC web site every month under "Voter Registration Statistics" at elections.wi.gov/statistics-data/

Month	# of Registered Voters	Change in # of Registered Voters
As of August 1, 2022	9,436	
September 1	9,636	+200
October 1	9,564	-72
November 1	9,617	+53
December 1	10,080	+463
TOTAL (2022)	10,080	+644
January 1, 2023	9,934	-146
February 1, 2023	9,890	-44

Ashland County Municipalities Get New Voting Machines!

All of Ashland County clerks in 16 jurisdictions got late holiday gifts in January—new voting machines! While this might not be what you were asking Santa for, clerks and voters will appreciate them in future elections.

According to Ashland County Clerk Heather Schutte state law required the Wisconsin Elections Commission decertify Automark marking equipment and M100 tabulators at the end of 2022. They were big, heavy and hard to move, as well as being outdated--Ashland County's machines were over 15 years old. While there are benefits to the new tabulators, they came with a hefty price tag. For example, the city of Ashland's machine costs \$6,820, and each municipality has to purchase their own, at a base price of about \$3,660.



New voting devices ready to go to all Ashland County polling places!



Georgianna Fanella (a Shanagolden poll worker), Town of Shanagolden Clerk Cindy Eder, and Kathy Aries (poll worker and substitute clerk) learned how to use their new machines at a recent training hosted by the Ashland County Clerk and ExpressVote staff.

A second machine will make it easier for anyone who has vision or hearing challenges to vote! The new ExpressVote machine is a 22-pound mobile device that marks a voter's ballot without the need for a pen. This leads to more accurate tallies for each candidate because it eliminates mistakes that lead to a spoiled ballot: when a voter fills in an oval incorrectly by putting a circle around it, making Xs next to a candidate's name, or checking off the oval instead of filling it.

Kyle Weber, an account manager with Elections System and Software, distributed new machines to all local clerks at a recent training in the Ashland County Courthouse. Kyle said the ExpressVote machines are smaller and lighter than old models, and there aren't any ink cartridges that can run out during election day. Instead, a thermal printer inside the machine uses heat and pressure to fill in the ovals that voters choose.

As with previous machines, these are locked when in use at the polls, and when stored before and after each election. They'll also be publicly tested at 10 days before the election! So, be sure to try the new AutoMark machines when you vote on April 4th!



Kyle Weber demonstrates how to use the new AutoMark machines to Sue MacArthur, Election/Poll Worker with the City of Mellen.

One more election is scheduled for 2023. Dates are set under Wis. Stat. 5.02(21):

Spring Election: April 4. One of the positions that voters will be voting on include Wisconsin Supreme Court Judge, See the Wisconsin Elections Commission web site at elections.wi.gov for more information.

*Election results were provided by Ashland County Clerk's Office and are available online at the Ashland County website: https://co.ashland.wi.us/county_clerk. Published February 2023.

Source for information and state statistics: Wisconsin Elections Commission website: <https://elections.wi.gov/elections>.

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